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STATE FOR NEA/ARPI, S/CT

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TAGS: [PTER](#) [KCRM](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [BA](#)

SUBJECT: PARLIAMENTARIANS SPEAK OUT AGAINST DRAFT
COUNTER-TERRORISM LAW

REF: A. MANAMA 551

[1](#)B. 04 MANAMA 1643

Classified by Ambassador William T. Monroe for reasons 1.4
(b) and (d).

Summary

[1](#)1. (C) The draft counter-terrorism law currently before parliament continues to be criticized by MPs and other political actors despite the King's unusual move to reach out to parliamentarians in support of the law. The law is designed to fill gaps in Bahrain's existing criminal code to facilitate the prosecution of terrorist crimes, including the planning of terrorist acts. Some deputies are proposing major amendments to address concerns that center on the fear that the law could be abused by the security authorities and return Bahrain to the days of the State Security law. Many MPs would prefer to reject it outright. Two prominent Shia religious leaders warned of the law restricting public freedoms and citizens' privacy. Bahrain's leaders, including the Crown Prince and Minister of Interior, remain optimistic in their conversations with us that the bill will be passed. If it is to be passed, the government will have to lobby harder and most certainly compromise. End Summary.

Despite King's Efforts, Draft CT Law Criticized

[1](#)2. (SBU) Despite the goodwill generated by the King's unusual outreach to parliamentary leaders April 13 in support of the draft counter-terrorism law (Ref A), and follow-up lobbying by the Minister of Interior, deputies representing many political blocs in the elected lower house of parliament, the Council of Representatives (COR), have spoken out against the bill. The most favorable reaction has been to propose significant revisions to the law. However, many deputies advocate rejecting it entirely. There has been much commentary that the law would return Bahrain to the days of the State Security law, under which the security forces committed human rights abuses during the 1990's.

MPs: Law Harsh, Unnecessary

[1](#)3. (U) The press has covered the comments of a wide range of political actors since the bill was first introduced to parliament in early April. Head of the Al Minbar (Muslim Brotherhood) bloc in the COR Salah Ali said, "The counter-terrorism law will not be passed without changing its name and content. We will not accept violating freedoms and distorting the spirit of democracy." Head of the COR's Economic bloc Jassem Abdul Aal said in a seminar that "the government wants to pass the counter-terrorism law as a way to alleviate pressure from western countries on Bahrain. At the top of these countries is the United States, to whom the Bahraini government wants to be able to say that Bahrain possesses strict laws and regulations that discourage terrorists from using its land as a base for their terrorist activities."

[1](#)4. (C) In private conversations with EmbOffs, MPs have reiterated their opposition to the draft law. Ahmed Behzad of the pro-government Independent bloc told us that parliament should debate the law while keeping in mind recent security developments in the region, a reference to attacks in Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and Qatar and arrest of militants in Oman. He is against dropping or rejecting the bill outright and would prefer to amend it to "better address the issue of terrorism." Behzad hinted that the government had already accepted the idea of major amendments coming from parliament. Al Minbar's Salah Ali said that a majority of deputies oppose the bill. He complained that the law is filled with references to the death penalty, which he considers to be too stringent and unnecessary. He noted that Bahrain has signed "numerous international treaties" on CT, and the new joint

GCC counter-terrorism law should address the issue sufficiently.

Fear Law Could Restrict Liberties

15. (C) Shaikh Abdulla Al Aali from the Shia Islamic bloc told us that he respects the King's invitation for parliament to engage with the government in a process of amending the draft law. However, this law, he said, like a number of other laws proposed by the government such as the press law and the demonstrations law, are a "step backwards" toward the era of the State Security law. His strategy is to table the law without amendments to highlight how unacceptable it is. Mohammad Al Shaikh Al Abbas, also from the Islamic bloc, echoed these sentiments, saying that the COR could either reject the bill immediately or engage in a potentially exhausting back-and-forth with the government on amending it. He favors rejection, saying that parliament should not bother trying to fix such a poorly written draft. Abdul Nabi Salman from the liberal Democratic bloc said the COR should table the proposal in its entirety because it is a "bad and restrictive law that cannot be amended." It is arbitrary and oppressive and has been presented at the wrong time. "We respect the King's invitation to engage," he said, "but nonetheless the law should be dropped."

16. (U) In his Friday, May 13 sermon, Shaikh Ali Salman, president of leading Shia opposition society Al Wifaq, said the draft law violates all forms of freedom, especially political freedom. He called on all Bahrainis, Sunni and Shia, to reject the law. He added, "We say to those who support this law that those who met with you in closed rooms today to convince you to support the law will meet with you tomorrow in dark prison cells to use the law against you." Shia cleric Abdulla Al Ghuraifi criticized the law in a late April sermon, saying it was a "form of security hegemony" that threatens Bahrain's reform project and narrows the field of public freedoms and citizens' privacy.

17. (U) Political activists attending a seminar on the law organized by the Bahrain Human Rights Society in late April agreed to send a letter to the King demanding the withdrawal of the draft. Pro-government Al Meethaq Society refused to sign the letter, saying this type of action should be a last resort. A follow-up committee, headed by activist Radhi Al Mousawi, coordinated the release of a statement signed by 30 Bahraini associations demanding that the government withdraw the law because it restricts public freedoms.

Comment

18. (C) Many critics on both sides of the Sunni-Shia divide view the law through a prism of how the government could potentially use its provisions to crack down on fellow sect members. Liberals worry about the country returning to a period of limited civil liberties and personal freedoms. Despite the public criticism and complaints, the King and government leaders may yet push this draft through parliament by energizing their allies in the COR and the upper house Shura Council.

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